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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0787

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1828

RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 001196

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM SOCI KZ

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: THE CONFLICTED POST-SOVIET MIND:  
NGOS, CONTROL, DEMOCRACY

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: After a regional official who was assigned as the Ambassador's "minder" during a two-day visit to Aktau interfered with the Ambassador's meeting with NGO representatives, the same official spoke frankly in private about Kazakhstan's post-Soviet history, NGOs, and democracy. Though he was a "single source," we suspect his views are not uncommon. END SUMMARY.

OLD-THINK, OLD-ACT WITH NGOS

¶2. (C) During his July 15-16 visit to the dynamic Caspian sea-port city, Aktau, the Ambassador met with Deputy Governor Askar Nurgaliyev, who provided a professional power-point briefing -- a real dog-and-pony show -- on the economic status and development plans for Aktau and Mangistau oblast (province). The Ambassador was then scheduled to leave the government building for a meeting elsewhere with heads of local NGOs that the Embassy had organized in advance. However, he was told to stay put, because the governor's office had moved the NGO meeting at the last minute, and without the Embassy's knowledge, to the government office "as a matter of efficiency." Despite the Ambassador's request to wait until all invited guests had arrived, the head of the governor's environmental office started the meeting. (NOTE: The Embassy later learned that the NGOs had been contacted by the regional government in advance and were told not to say anything negative about the government. END NOTE.)

¶3. (C) After praising the role of NGOs and the importance of civil society working responsibly with the government to improve the lives of citizens, the Ambassador asked the NGO representatives to introduce themselves and to give a short summary of their work. Most spent their brief time not talking about their work but complaining about the difficulty of getting grants. After about 20 minutes, Rakhimbek Amirzhanov, the special adviser to the governor who was assigned as the Ambassador's stick-like-glue escort, called an end to the meeting because "Deputy Governor Nurgaliyev wants to see you again." When the Ambassador returned to Nurgaliyev's office, the deputy governor had nothing more to say than to wish him a pleasant visit in Mangistau oblast.

¶4. (C) The NGO heads were still in the corridor outside the office, and a few tried to chat briefly with the Ambassador, but Amirzhanov, who appeared to be in his early 40s and previously had worked for the Kazakhstani oil services company, Neftstroiservis Ltd., pointedly tapped his watch and hustled the Embassy delegation away. When they were outside and out of ear-shot of anyone else, Amirzhanov, noting the Ambassador's irritation, tried to explain that he had learned his "ultra-efficiency" when he had been an exchange student in Japan.

¶5. (C) During the two-day visit, it became evident that Amirzhanov indeed was the Ambassador's "official minder," but it likewise became evident that he had a mind of his own and was not shy about expressing his opinions, so long as no one else could hear them. During an hour-long road trip to Kuryk Village to view the massive Ersai fabrication yard that produces components for the oil-drilling platforms in the Caspian, and that will eventually become the main port for the Kazakhstan Caspian Transportation System to ship oil to Azerbaijan, Amirzhanov meditated on history, the role of NGOs, the need for devolution of power, and democracy.

#### A MEDITATION ON HISTORY

¶6. (C) Amirzhanov told the Ambassador, "You know, it would have been much better if you had defeated the Soviet Union in a war. After World War II, you distributed common-sense booklets to every survivor in Germany and Japan about democracy and the free market. As early as 1942, you were planning and preparing for post-war rebuilding after your

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victory. In our case, however, you had no plan (when the Soviet Union collapsed), we weren't physically destroyed, and you didn't occupy us to rebuild us. It would have been better if you had, because now we are still Soviet trying to figure out how to be a free-market democracy. We've done better than some, but we are still Soviet."

#### ON NGOS

¶7. (C) Amirzhanov said, "I like what you said, that NGOs should work responsibly with the government to improve society." The Ambassador interjected, "I didn't mean NGOs shouldn't criticize or even sometimes oppose the government." Amirzhanov said, "I understand that. During good times, they can have as much freedom as they want; but during difficult times, like we have now, we must be vigilant that they don't get out of control and take to the streets. That could lead to serious negative consequences." The Ambassador suggested, "Your government is too strong to worry about that." Amirzhanov replied, "I think I agree with you, but we have to prevent that first step that could lead to chaos."

#### ON DEVOLUTION OF POWER

¶8. (C) Amirzhanov said, "You have to understand I was born in the Soviet Union. I am a Soviet man, but I have been lucky to have had international experience, and so I understand more." The Ambassador asked, "What do you understand?" Amirzhanov replied, "I understand that all of our officials -- bureaucrats; national, regional, and local officials; judges -- all of them are responsible up the chain to "Papa" (President Nazarbayev) and not down the chain to the people. He pays them to support him -- not directly, of course, but that's why we have such terrible corruption. We need elected officials so that they will be responsible to the people. We need independent judges -- they aren't stupid, of course, but they aren't independent."

#### THE SOVIET MAN PROPOSES

¶9. (C) Amirzhanov said, "Do you remember the film, "Jefferson in Paris'? He told his daughter, 'Give democracy to the educated, and they will lead.' That's what we -- at

least many of us -- want to do. We have to wait until we have a well-educated critical mass to allow a freer democracy. Our educational system collapsed with the collapse of the Soviet Union. We now have to wait until we can build a new educated class, so that the mob doesn't destroy everything. You could help us (improve education to achieve democracy), but you don't seem to be very interested.

You are the richest country in the world, but most of your money goes for war, doesn't it."

HOAGLAND